

## County Council: School system needs to track and publicize serious crimes

County schools need to establish a plan for releasing information about serious incidents that happen on school grounds, on school buses or at school-sponsored events, according to a report released Tuesday.

### School Notes SEAN R. SEDAM

The report from the County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight also recommends that the school system, county police and the State's Attorney's Office develop a plan for sharing information and coordinating investigations of criminal incidents that involve students.

An agreement among the three agencies is in the final stages, schools spokesman Brian K. Edwards said. The report calls for the agreement to be in place by November.

"What that's going to do for us and for everyone is give us greater consistency on how we handle events when police are called, when the State's Attorney's Office is involved in the process," he said.

The agreement will define when police should be called.

"Police have said they don't want to be called every time there's a fight," Edwards said, pointing out that the school system's student rights and responsibilities policy defines incidents where police will be called, such as those involving weapons, physical assaults and gang activity.

Training school employees on how to handle incidents is important, said Edward A. Clarke, who was involved in efforts to craft the agreement before resigning as the school system's security director to run for county sheriff. Clarke came in second in last week's Democratic primary.

Principals need to be able to decide whether police should be called in or whether an incident is minor enough to be handled at the school level, he said.

For example, when one student forcibly takes another student's lunch money, "That would be seen as strong armed robbery in the State's Attorney's eyes," Clarke said.

The OLO report calls on the school system to adopt a plan by April 2007 for "the preparation, use and public release of a 'School Safety Report.'"

"The superintendent and board are going to look carefully at all the recommendations and decide the best course of action going forward," Edwards said.

A few schools are already using a new database, called the Incident Reporting System, that allows the school system to record and track serious incidents by school and by student and identify any trends.

Any public release of information about incidents needs context, Clarke said. Data can be "open to interpretation" and might give people the false impression that an incident is ongoing when it was isolated. "Presumably and practically we know that schools are very safe," he said.

The council report recommended that the county push for state legislation requiring all public school districts to track and publicly report school safety data.

The council's Public Safety and Education committees will hold a joint meeting to discuss the report at 9:30 a.m. Oct. 19 in the County Council Office Building at 100 Maryland Ave. in Rockville. Call 240-777-7900.

### Money for the visual arts

A \$3 million gift from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation will go toward the visual arts center that Montgomery College is building on its Takoma Park-Silver Spring campus.

The money will be used to enhance the entrance of the visual arts center, set to open next year, buy state-of-the-art equipment, technology and furnishings and cover upkeep.

"Our new visual arts center — which will now carry The Cafritz Foundation name — will be an exciting addition to the growing Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District, benefiting both the students we serve through a wide variety of arts programs and an array of artists from the community," college President Charlene R. Nunley said in a statement.

The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Art Center will be the home of the college's arts programs, including the Department of Visual Arts, the School of Art and Design and the Montgomery College-Arts Institute. It will feature studio classrooms, computer labs, an art library and supply store, a great hall, an art gallery and an outdoor sculpture studio. There will also be 20 working studios for rent by artists in the community, modeled after the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria, Va.

The art center is the third phase of the college's \$88 million expansion of the Takoma Park-Silver Spring campus. A cultural arts center, which will include a 500-seat theater and a 100-seat black box arena theater, will open in 2009.

The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation has awarded more than \$243 million in grants in the Washington since 1970.

Announcement of the gift, believed to be the largest in history of Maryland community colleges, comes a day after the University of Maryland, College Park announced a \$4.4 million donation from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to build a new journalism building.

### Board meets Monday

A discussion of the school system's comprehensive master plan will highlight the school board's meeting at 7 p.m. Monday. The plan is submitted to the state Department of Education annually under the Thornton school funding law.

The meeting will be held in the Carver Educational Services Center at 850 Hungerford Drive in Rockville. Call 901-279-3617.